

# Gazette

## COMMENT

### Hospital tale sign of times

**W**ENDY Dennant was horrified to find she was being moved to a different ward during her short stay at Colchester General Hospital.

As if her treatment was not traumatic enough, after settling down for the evening she was wheeled to a different ward, only to return 48 hours later.

Mrs Dennant praised hospital staff, as is nearly always the case, but she was left upset by the upheaval.

Being an in-patient, whether for a minor or serious operation, is a daunting experience.

There is no way to make a hospital stay an attractive proposition.

Hospital bosses would agree every effort should be made to ensure life is made as stress-free as possible for patients.

They do not expect to go into hospital and be moved from ward to ward.

We should not lose sight of the fact our health service is free and, despite the Government's assurances it would not slash funding, is having to find savings.

But Mrs Dennant is right to be concerned about a ward opening for five days a week instead of seven.

It is a sign of the times.

The NHS is becoming more efficient, with patients not having to stay in hospital as long or go to hospital at all.

It is also having to be more efficient with its expenditure.

That's a good thing, as long as it is not at the expense of patients.

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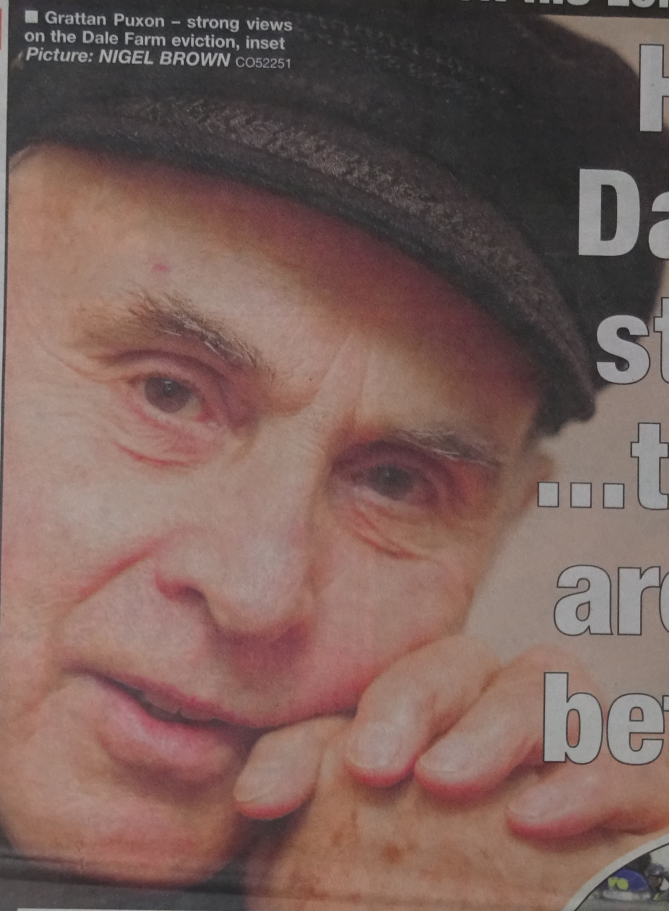
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## GIPSY CAMPAIGNER ON HIS LONG FIGHT FOR JUSTICE

■ Grattan Puxon - strong views on the Dale Farm eviction, inset Picture: NIGEL BROWN C052251



### Horror of Dale Farm still hurts ...travellers are treated better here



**G**RATTAN Puxon watched the dramatic Dale Farm evictions from the front line.

The campaigner, who lives in John Harper Street, Colchester, stood beside activists and members of the travelling community and witnessed the illegal pitches being dismantled.

He describes the actions of police and bailiffs as "illegal over-enforcement".

Mr Puxon, 72, says the experience left him exhausted.

But he is far from finished in his mission to find the evicted residents a new place to live.

On Tuesday, he was at Basildon Council for a public inquiry which is considering the council's decision to refuse planning permission for 12 plots.

The hearing follows last month's clearance of the six-acre site in Crays Hill after a decade-long row over unauthorised plots. The operation saw violent clashes between police and protesters.

**Colchester has a good reputation among travellers as being liberal**

By JAMES COX  
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Mr Puxon said: "I was shaken for several days after."

"It was shattering, both physically and mentally - the biggest eviction in the UK's history."

"We never wanted to fight the police. It was supposed to be a civil matter between us, the council and the bailiffs."

"But they came flying in with tasers aiming everywhere. There is a clear case of over-enforcement."

Mr Puxon claims a deal to meet council officers outside the fences on the day of the eviction to negotiate the police operation was never honoured.

He said: "The people at Dale Farm were always willing to move, but needed a legal place to move to."

"The eviction amounts to ethnic cleansing. There has been damage dealt to the legal properties there. The land has been completely raked up."

The former Colchester Gazette reporter moved to Ireland in 1960 to avoid military service. The ironic twist is the lifetime of confrontation he would face as a result of that trip.

It was in Dublin, working as a freelance journalist, where he first met traveller families.

He said: "I never thought it

would consume my life, but it just snowballed. I had an instant affinity and lived with them."

He helped to open a makeshift school for traveller children, called St Christopher's, a scheme which was moved from from location to location ten times in three years.

Mr Puxon returned to Colchester in 1966. Incensed by a pub that put up a "No Gypsies" sign on its door, he arranged a meeting at the same venue under the guise of a human rights group.

He says it was the makings of the Gypsy Council.

More than 35 years later the organisation is still helping travellers through planning authority laws and supporting them in their fights against evictions.

Mr Puxon says he has been buoyed by the support campaigners received during the Dale Farm eviction. He feels the tide of public opinion is turning, partic-

ularly closer to home. Colchester Council has granted permission for a £1.7million, 12-pitch site in Severalls Lane. Work on it began a month ago.

The site was chosen when pitches in Haven Road, Colchester, closed in 2004.

Mr Puxon said: "Colchester has a good reputation among travellers as being liberal."

"It opened the old site on Haven Road and now the new one on Severalls Lane."

"It looks like the situation is stabilising for travellers."

"After all, Colchester is a place famed for always homing Romany people."

The legacy of Dale Farm lingers on, though, and campaigners still haven't given up the fight.

Mr Puxon said: "We are hopeful the council will still do a U-turn. We just hope something good has come of all this."